

March 12, 2009

Senators,

SENATE AGRICULTURE

EXHIBIT NO. 9

DATE 3-12-09

BILL NO. HB 418

As an outfitter and horse owner I strongly support HB 418 and am writing to encourage your assistance in the passage of this bill and asking you to oppose any amendments. This bill must provide protection from harassment to attract investors to construct a processing plant in Montana. This bill is critical for the humane treatment of horses... As a horse owner, I honor my horses but recognize that unwanted animals must have a viable venue for usage.


Animal rights activists have spread a lot of misinformation on the horse slaughter situation across the United States. Those of us in the livestock industry would also like our voices heard and to set the record straight. The horse is considered livestock, not a pet or a companion. Each year we pay an assessment tax for owning these animals and receive a tax deduction as a business expense. The horse is therefore considered private property by the government, and as long as private property is treated humanely, the government cannot tell someone what to do with it.

The closure of horse slaughter plants in Texas and Illinois has resulted in a large number of unwanted horses throughout the United States. One third of all horse owners make less than \$50,000 annually, and without the choice to sell their horses to slaughter plants more dangerous and inhumane methods are being used to dispose of them. Horse owners are unable to care for these animals due to the downturn in the economy, high feed costs, a lack of use of the animal, or shortage of personal land to run them on. These horses are being turned out on roads, government and private lands and are essentially being abandoned. They are left to be hit by vehicles (thus posing a threat to humans), or to starve to death, die of disease or untreated injury.

In essence, these lower level horses have no economic value. No time in American history has livestock in the United States been so reduced to such a worthless commodity. During the Revolutionary War, the tragic Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the Great Depression the horse held its value. During wartime, peacetime, a turbulent economy and the fluctuation of supply and demand, the horse has continued its value until now. Montana is in a unique position to help the horse industry of our beloved state as well as the rest of the nation. In addition, we can create an economic stimulus here in our own state by adding to our tax base and job pool.

The American Veterinary Medical Association, American Quarter Horse Association, Montana Quarter Horse Association, Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association, Montana Stock Growers Association and other livestock organizations have gone on record as supporting horse slaughter. We care about our horses and the industry and the future of the horse in the United States. Our goal is to obtain a long term solution which is something our opponents did not facilitate when the plants were closed. Horse owners can still place their horses in sanctuaries or give them away to a owner in better circumstances, but as a member of this industry we should be able to have a choice as where our horses, our personal property, goes. We encourage you to put common sense back into the horse industry and support HB 418 and oppose any amendments to it.

Respectfully,



Doug Landers

Elk Ridge Outfitters

256 Kister Hardy Road

Wilsall, Montana 59086